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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON SPAIN'S BOMBINGS

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, March 16, is the result of the Spanish elections and the victory of Zapatero. All reports focus on Zapatero's position on the situation in Iraq and his remarks that he will withdraw troops from Iraq. One headline views the elections as a "political coup" and another views the new Prime Minister as "turning his back to the United States".

Editorial Commentary

-- "The fall of Aznar"

Chief editor Taher Udwan writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/16): "The results of the elections in Spain truly constitutes a coup d'etat, as one commentator said. One of the personalities of the war on Iraq is now out of the game, which only leaves Blair and Bush, who may face the same fate, especially the U.S. president since he faces the presidential elections next fall.. Election competitions in countries like the United States, Britain, Spain and Italy are no longer sideline issues for the people of the region. They are domestic-related issues, because any change towards weakening the war camp is a win for the security and stability of the Middle East.. The Bush-Aznar-Blair camp used lies not only with regard to Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, but also with regard to the rebuilding of Iraq as a justification for continuing the occupation of that country.. This camp came to the region not to strengthen stability there, but to 'alter' this stability and change it into chaos, conflicts and wars. This camp does not have a program for peace, neither in Palestine nor in Iraq and the Gulf, but rather seeks, with all its military, political and economic might, to change the Middle East into a new arena for hot and cold wars.. We hope that the 'change' will first affect the ranks of this camp and that we would see more defeats for those extremists, who excel in telling lies as much as they excel in launching wars. Such a change would be happy event(s) for a Middle East that looks to genuine peace and security."

-- "This disaster too?"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes on the back page of independent, mass-appeal Arabic daily Al-Arab Al-Yawm (03/16): "That's all we need: for this terrifying criminal act [Spain's bombings] to be linked with the world of Arabs and Islam, to inflict horrible harm and pain to a wonderful country and noble people, millions of whom took to the streets to protest the war on Iraq.. We could have done without this disaster with the European nation, a longed-for factor of balance against the American completely-pro Israeli monopoly."

-- "Spain and Iraq"

Columnist Basem Sakijha writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/16): "The socialists' achievement of the ruling power in Spain seems to be more of a coup than natural development. Analysts differ about the significance of the Madrid bombings in attaining this result, but everyone agrees that the Iraqi factor was the one factor that pushed the Spanish people to vote against Aznar's party.. The results of the Spanish elections say a great deal, most importantly is that the human conscience cannot remain in permanent slumber. We hope that the same will apply to the American elections."

-- "The Spanish coup: does terrorism achieve political results?"

Columnist Bader Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (03/16): "Although many opponents of Aznar's government, including us Arabs and Muslims who were displeased with that government's support for the American aggressive war, are going to be happy with the results of the elections, the consequence is going to be disastrous for Arabs and Muslims in Europe. It is almost certain now that responsibility for the ugly crime in Madrid points to Al-Qa'eda and non-specific fundamentalist-extremist organizations.. The outcome of proving the responsibility of Islamic fundamentalists for the crime is going to mean complete and radical changes for the lives of millions of Arabs and Muslims living in Europe and is going to add another defamation for the reputation of Islam. The most dangerous consequence of such proof would be the link between the crime, the role of the Spanish government in Iraq, and the results of the elections. This entails a very serious political message: terrorism can actually achieve beneficial political objectives.. The crime is a crime and cannot be justified by political results. It is silly and immoral for some to claim that the Madrid crime may have been beneficial because it contributed to ousting Aznar and changing the Spanish government. Killing 200 innocent people can never be an acceptable means for achieving political objectives. If some Arabs believe that killing innocent people is justifiable as vengeance against politicians and governments who have adopted policies unacceptable to Arabs, then that is a horrible moral downfall."

GNEHM